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Who failed Rose?

Little girl with a big smile trapped in life of squalor

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, March 18, 2007

By Ron Fonger

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Flint - The people who were supposed to look out for Rose Kelley got repeated warnings about what they eventually called "indescribable" filth inside her family's eastside home, according to newly released state documents.

But nine months after the lice-covered 5-year-old died from liver failure and neglect, the state Department of Human Services has cleared itself of any mishandling of her case.

More than 1,000 pages of documents obtained by The Flint Journal through the Freedom of Information Act show problems percolated for years in the home of Michelle Bowen and Jeffrey Kelley despite five separate complaints to DHS about unsanitary conditions and lice.

Reports from Flint police, DHS, the Oakland County medical examiner and other agencies were included in documents released to The Journal.

They include a caseworker's assessment more than two years before Rose Kelley's death that she and her siblings "did not appear to be clean," slept on dirty mattresses without sheets, and that their home was "unfit" for children.

After each investigation, the state offered advice and help, and Bowen and Kelley put their house in good enough order to pass inspection - at least until another complaint would start the process all over again.

The chronic pattern left Rose Kelley and three other children caught in their N. Franklin Avenue rental house with no escape from a suffocating stench of garbage and dog feces and swarms of bugs that came with it.

Conditions at the time of Rose Kelley's death were so bad a contractor hired to clean the home told police he was "ate up" by fleas inside and threw up three times because of the smell, according to a Flint police report.

QUICK TAKE

Finding help

- Anyone who has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect can report it to the state Department of Human Services, (800) 942-4357, or any police agency.

- If you need help keeping your home or children clean and safe, you can contact Family Resource Centers in Flint at Durant-Tuuri-Mott, Bryant and Washington elementary schools. Information is also available at (810) 760-2222.

Multimedia

Go to http://blog.mlive.com/flintjournal/special/rose_kelley/ for:

- Audio: Hear the 911 call from Rose Kelley's parents.
- Audio: Listen to a Q&A with reporter Ron Fonger.
- Documents: See a state report on the case.

What is child abuse and neglect?

Here's how Michigan's Child Protection law defines abuse and

In response to The Journal's FOIA request, DHS released photos taken inside the home that appear to show a chaotic dwelling littered with trash, clothing, scattered dog food and with bugs dominating the images.

Rose Kelley died June 3, 2006, from liver disease likely brought on by malnutrition and overuse of the fever- and pain-reliever acetaminophen, according to a medical examiner's report.

The brown-haired, blue-eyed girl weighed just 35 pounds at the time of her death, so sick in her last days that her speech was slurred and she was too weak to walk, according to transcripts of interviews with her parents.

She died without seeing a doctor, her parents told police, because they feared what would happen if doctors saw how badly the children's hair was infested with lice or if social workers saw the condition of their home.

Jeffrey Kelley and Bowen are in state prison for a minimum of 17 months after pleading guilty to involuntary manslaughter in their daughter's death.

DHS "acted appropriately, in compliance with policy and law, in its handling of the Rose Kelley case," according to an internal investigation released to The Journal as part of its request for documents.

But the finding by the Office of the Family Advocate - consistent with a review by the state Office of Children's Ombudsman in August - hasn't satisfied everyone, including Jeffrey Kelley's former sister-in-law and some state legislators.

"DHS was very aware this was a bad situation ... (Jeffrey Kelley has) taken responsibility for being a bad parent (and) I don't defend his actions, but to say DHS had no responsibility to the children - I don't agree with that," said Kimberly Kelley. .

neglect:

- Child abuse: "Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare that occurs through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment, by a parent, a legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a teacher, a teacher's aide, or a member of the clergy."

- Child neglect: "Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare that occurs through ... negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter or medical care (or) placing a child at unreasonable risk to the child's health or welfare by failure of the parent, legal guardian, or other person responsible for the child's health or welfare to intervene to eliminate that risk when the person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk."

"How can you sit there and say that system works when this little girl is dead?"

Bowen and Jeffrey Kelley declined to be interviewed from state prison, where each is serving a minimum of 17 months after pleading guilty to involuntary manslaughter in their daughter's death.

But in statements to police, Bowen said she knew her daughter was "getting pretty bad" before she died because she was unable to walk to the bathroom.

Rather than taking their daughter to the hospital, Bowen said the couple clothed her in disposable pull-up diapers and left a cooking pot for her to vomit in.

After several days of illness, the little girl died, her head so covered with biting lice that one witness told police her scalp smelled of rotting flesh.

In a one-page report, Office of Family Advocate Director Steve Yager called the Kelley case "tragic," but said it didn't point to problems with DHS' handling of repeated complaints against Bowen and Jeffrey Kelley.

Those complaints of unsanitary conditions and dirty children were serious enough to investigate, Yager said, but never bad enough that the department could have removed children from the home.

"(It) underlines the importance of early intervention and strong community supports for families, two key principles underlying DHS child welfare reforms under way for the past four years," Yager's letter says.

"This is anything but an exact science when you deal with human beings," he said. "This is in real time. ... You do have families that are marginal families. There are people working really hard to make it, (and) you try to support them (to) do the best they can."

Yager said his review of files connected to the household make it appear something drastic must have happened between mid-November 2005 - the last time a caseworker filed a report about the family - and Rose's death less than seven months later.

He said he trusts the reports filed by DHS employees who said that they visited the household seven times in 2005 alone. The agency says it made help for housecleaning and lice available to the family.

On Nov. 18, 2005, a DHS caseworker concluded there "is not a preponderance of evidence to support the (most recent) allegation of neglect."

Others, however, have suggested caseworkers were missing something obvious to others. For example:

- A brother of Jeffrey Kelley told Flint police that household hygiene had been deplorable for years, with diapers simply left on the floors, cockroaches in food and dirty dishes scattered around the home.

The house stank so badly on hot days, he said, that people on the sidewalk could smell it, and his brother and Bowen would go weeks without bathing.

- A neighbor told police she never saw children outside playing, and a child in the home told police Rose Kelley's hair was so infested by lice that she was kept inside "because my stepdad doesn't want to be embarrassed in front of the neighbors."

- Another relative told police the children "smelled like feet, (arm) pit, sex and funk" because they were rarely bathed.

"At some point, somebody that had interaction with that family should have said, We've got to get these children out of here," said state Rep. David Robertson, R-Grand Blanc Twp. "Maybe we need to expand the circumstances under which (a termination) petition can be submitted to the court."

"Saving that child has to be the paramount concern," said Robertson, who took part in a hearing by the House Special Committee on Child Protection in Flint in August. "You allow for due process (for the parents), but at some point you say, Enough," Robertson said.

The state legislator said he would support changes in state law to better extend protection to children in bad homes and called the Rose Kelley case "a microcosm of everything that is tragic about our society."

State Rep. David Law, R-West Bloomfield, said he's not surprised DHS' internal investigation found no shortcomings in its own performance.

"These families having multiple contacts with the department and nothing of substance happening is common," Law said. "You've heard the old expression Where there's smoke, there's fire'? We may have to look at staying in contact with families after a certain number" of complaints.

"This is an issue I'm going to continue to work on. ... In my opinion, there is a lack of accountability," he said.

Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton said DHS "attempted to make the conditions better" inside Rose Kelley's home but fell short.

"Clearly, because Rose died, the mother and father needed assistance beyond what they received," Leyton said. "There's no question there were enormous problems in the home. It's also clear that at various points, DHS was aware of that."



Timeline to tragedy

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, March 18, 2007

By Ron Fonger

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Records obtained by The Flint Journal through the Freedom of Information Act show there were early signs of trouble in the Flint home where 5-year-old Rose Kelley died June 3, 2006:

Jan. 2, 1998

- Michelle Bowen, Rose Kelley's mother, brings a female child to Hurley Medical Center, complaining that the child may have been sexually abused. The state Department of Human Services investigates and finds "very little evidence that sexual abuse took place."

Nov. 18, 2001

- DHS receives a complaint that children in the home are filthy and may have no food. The person tells the state the home is cluttered, scattered with dog feces and piled with dirty dishes. A DHS caseworker finds the house "very clean and picked up" and the refrigerator, freezer and cupboards well-stocked during a visit. The complaint is dismissed "due to the complete lack of evidence."

Oct. 24, 2003

- A telephone complaint alleges an unidentified child suffering with hydrocephalus - an abnormal accumulation of fluid in the cranium - was being medically neglected in the home. A caseworker finds the home a little messy, but not a health hazard for children. DHS finds the child in question "has been medically neglected" and begins monitoring the family "as required by policy."

Nov. 19, 2003

- Bowen and Jeffrey Kelley, Rose Kelley's father, sign a service agreement, saying they will work with the school of the child with hydrocephalus and follow through on all recommendations.

Jan. 12, 2004

- A caseworker finds children "did not appear to be clean" during a home visit and writes to the couple, detailing problems of trash strewn on floors, children who appeared unbathed, no sheets on beds and dirty dishes piled on a kitchen table. The case is closed two weeks later after a caseworker finds the home "clean and appropriate" in a follow-up visit.

Dec. 10, 2004

- A child in the home has missed most of the school year because of a continuing head lice problem, according to a complainant, who says the house is "a complete mess" strewn with trash, dirty diapers and clothes - "a complete dump." Eleven days later, DHS finds a preponderance of evidence that children had been physically neglected. A safety assessment by the department says the children are not likely in immediate danger, and allow Bowen and Kelley to sign an agreement aimed at making their home "free from neglect and head lice." The family is referred for help.

May 1, 2005

- A social worker writes, "The kids feet are filthy due to the floor being so filthy. Walls need (to be) washed. ... Dad is not working but Mom is. ... I believe Dad needs to pick up some share of responsibilities."

May 30, 2005

- Dimensions Therapeutic Services, a state contractor based in Lathrup Village, files a report saying the couple is "making progress on their goals. Mom appears to still need more effort from Dad. ... They have done a tremendous job getting the house cleaned." The Flint Journal could not reach the company for comment. company execs will not return calls. rsf

June 21, 2005

- A caseworker files a report saying Michelle Bowen's doctor has prescribed her medication for depression. Monitoring of the family ends after the caseworker reports improvement in housekeeping and delivers head lice treatment supplies donated by a local church.

June 30, 2005

- Dimensions Therapeutic Services files a report saying the family has made some progress to improve hygiene. "Unfortunately, the family's standards for hygiene and basic cleaning maintenance of the home is below what it should be for having small children in the home."

Sept. 12, 2005

- A complainant says the family home "appears not to have been cleaned in a year. The whole house is infested with cockroaches, beetles. ... Any food that falls on the floor stays there. ... Children are filthy. ... The basement is filled with dog poop." A caseworker makes an appointment to see the home - giving the family notice of the visit - and finds "no debris anywhere. There were no dirty dishes. ... The family's table was clean." On a return visit two weeks later, a caseworker finds the home has been picked up but "still had a strong odor." After a third visit to the home, the case is closed.

Oct. 14, 2005

- A complainant says the family home "reeks of urine bad enough that it causes one's eyes to burn. The home is infested with roaches and flies. The carpets in the home are just filthy." A caseworker following up on the complaint notes a strong smell in the house "that comes from the carpet that the family can't afford to replace." The same worker says there is food available and the house is picked up. On Nov. 18, the caseworker concludes there "is not a preponderance of evidence to support the allegation of neglect."

May 16, 2006

- A caseworker meets the couple at Flint's Washington Elementary School, telling the two that the state can help them by sending someone to the home to "get things cleaned up and instruct them on how to take care of the lice problem." The report says the couple "refused services from DHS at this time."

June 3, 2006

- Flint police find Rose Kelley, 5, dead inside her home after a 911 call from Bowen and Kelley, reporting that their daughter has stopped breathing. An emergency room doctor notes three surviving children from the home are "unkempt," "dirty" and have an "incredible amount of head lice." A DHS caseworker called to the scene reports swarms of flies and cockroaches crawling on dirty dishes stacked around the home, calling conditions "indescribable."

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March 17, 2007

Big shock in little town

Residents stunned after Adrian day care owner charged with molesting infant, others

Robert Snell / The Detroit News

ADRIAN -- No one plays on the plastic slide anymore, and the swings behind Guardian Family Daycare are still.

The day care center based in Douglas Clark's home, once a magnet for neighborhood children, was abandoned Friday amid mounting evidence that at least eight children -- including an infant -- had been abused there over a span of three years, according to police. Clark has been charged with abusing three children so far.

"This is just just, sick," Police Chief Terry Collins said. "It's torn everybody apart. This whole town is in shock."

Collins said the number of victims could grow "exponentially" as the investigation continues. Police identified two more victims Friday, bringing the total to eight children ranging in age from an infant to a 13-year-old.

So far, Clark, 52, who is being held on \$5 million bond and has a March 26 preliminary exam, is charged with 44 counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct involving three of the children. He faces up to life in prison if convicted. Police expect to be back in court early next week to file additional charges in more cases, Detective Sgt. Lynn Courington said.

Clark investigated 3 years ago

Clark also faces the outrage of a small town 72 miles southwest of Detroit, where resident reaction Friday ranged from repulsion to anger to frustration because Clark was investigated three years ago after similar allegations surfaced.

"I'd like to get my hands on him," said neighbor Ezell Williams, 43, who spent Friday morning chasing his dog "Puppy" through Clark's neighborhood. "Some guys I know are saying they want to get into jail to get to him, for real."

Clark was not charged with a crime following the earlier allegations because one accuser's family refused to cooperate and a second accuser's story could not be corroborated, police said. The day care stayed open after a state investigation did not find any violations, Michigan Department of Human Services spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said.

Police have reopened those cases, the police chief said.

John Garza and wife Robbin operate the Game Room next door to the Clark home. The tiny business, decorated with an old steer skull and artwork of dogs playing poker, is a place where seniors play cards and socialize.

"We see kids riding bikes in the summer time and it didn't seem like anything was wrong," John Garza, 64, said.

Meanwhile, the state on Tuesday suspended Clark's day care registration, which he has held since July 22, 2002. The registration, which the state is in the process of revoking, lets Clark care for up to six children.

Police launched an investigation into the most recent allegations March 9 after a mother of a 13-year-old discovered her son was having explicit Internet chats with a man police say was Clark. Police obtained a search warrant for Clark's home and seized his computer and found videotapes and still images showing the man performing various sex acts with underage children, police said.

Clark, who is not cooperating with police, would set up a video camera on a tripod in the home's living room, bedroom and dining room to record the sex acts, police said.

Police have talked with the children's parents, and the state Department of Human Services is helping interview the victims.

Clark's wife can't be reached

Clark's wife, Lovina, told police she was unaware of her husband's alleged conduct, and police have not charged her with a crime. She could not be reached for comment Friday.

Several Adrian parents said the allegations exposed their worst fears of a babysitter violating a sacred trust.

Clark's home is in an industrial part of town, in what was once an Irish neighborhood called "The Hill" and faces the shuttered American Chain and Cable factory.

Neighbors said it was not uncommon to see 50 children playing football in a vacant lot next to the house, or swinging, sliding or shooting hoops in the backyard play area.

Clark was known to take children on fishing trips or skateboarding, neighbor Mary Gottschalk said.

Her three children never joined the games, however. Gottschalk, who lives across the vacant lot from the Clark home, never let them.

In light of the allegations, she's relieved.

"You never know what's out there," the 38-year-old said Friday.

The arrest has left her trying to explain the unexplainable to her children, and issuing an order.

"Stay in the yard instead of wandering over there," she said, gesturing toward Clark's home.

Area residents horrified

After seeing Clark's police photo on the TV news, waitress Jeanne Gwilt wondered if Clark ever wandered into a booth at Alpha Koney Island, a diner across from the courthouse where the pancakes are the size of platters.

"I was curious if I ever served him," the 42-year-old Tecumseh resident said, leaning on the diner's front counter. "I wouldn't have trusted a man to watch my kids."

Adrian parent Kimberly Myers-Pinkel relied on elderly women and accredited preschools for her two children. She was horrified by the crimes police say happened inside the Clark home.

"Just sick. What drives somebody to do something like that?" Myers-Pinkel, 36, said while waiting for oatmeal, toast and eggs over easy. "They're just babies."

That fact has made the investigation one of the most difficult in the Adrian police chief's career and for investigators dealing with young victims and traumatized parents.

"You see some mothers just crumble," Collins said.

You can reach Robert Snell at (313) 222-2028 or rsnell@detnews.com.

What's next

Douglas Clark, 52, will have a preliminary exam March 26. On Monday, he was arraigned on 44 counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct involving three children.

More charges are expected.

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The Daily Telegram

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MONDAY MARCH 19, 2007 Last modified: *Saturday, March 17, 2007 9:48 PM EDT*

EDITORIAL: Daycare case shows 'safety' never certain

— At issue: Reaction to a case of sexual child abuse involving daycare at an Adrian home.

— Our view: The case calls for us to support families involved, and to become more vigilant because there are no guarantees of safety.

As a community, we are horrified and saddened by this week's arrest of an Adrian daycare operator on 44 charges of sexually abusing children under his care. The number of counts alone makes this one of the most serious daycare abuse cases in Michigan history. It brings back memories of the daycare scandals of the 1980s, and many people in Lenawee County have expressed shock that this type of case could happen here.

It's important to not jump to conclusions or be caught in a national media circus, something we've seen happen in other abuse cases. The defendant in this case, Douglas Jay Clark, is entitled to due process and the presumption of innocence unless proven guilty.

However it also is essential that we offer our sympathy and support to the families involved, and pray that the truth will be found and that any damage done to the children is minimal. No child or parent should ever be confronted with the nightmare of sexual abuse. The families should receive appropriate long-term medical and psychological care to assist their healing from this ordeal — regardless of what verdicts a court eventually may hand down.

In the weeks and months ahead it will be tempting to point fingers, assign blame and seek guarantees that no such thing could ever happen again. We hope everyone involved shows restraint. In cases in which an adult sexually abuses a child, the perpetrator is the person who bears ultimate responsibility.

Our role as parents and community members requires us to juggle sometimes contradictory roles. As protectors, we need to watch and listen to our children because no place is automatically safe. We must report and expose suspected abuse in spite of the fact that doing so may seem as frightening to children as the abuse itself.

We also must balance training children to be wary of truly dangerous people, while simultaneously teaching them that the world also is full of amazingly wonderful people.

Similarly, society must trust law enforcement and prosecutors to identify and pursue villains with ultimate vigor. At the same time we must realize that no regulation and no agency can ensure protection. For, as this week illustrates, even in Lenawee County there are no guarantees to shield us from what suddenly seems a much darker world.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--

Mother sought in son's death

By Corky Emrick

Sturgis Journal

Published: Friday, March 16, 2007 8:17 PM CDT

CASSOPOLIS - Cass County Sheriff's deputies are looking for a mother accused of manslaughter in the death of her son.

In a report by WSBT, Tina Gullett failed to appear for a custody hearing for her three surviving children.

Investigators say her son, Peyton Jenkins, had Cystic Fibrosis and died last June after choking on his own bodily fluids.

Jenkins was a student at Central Elementary in White Pigeon.

Gullett is accused of neglecting to get Jenkins the proper medical treatment.

Investigators also said she didn't go to doctors to get a rod in his thigh bone removed after surgery.

"The break was already healing, and what would have needed to happen is that would have to have been removed," said Isabel Solis, an investigator with Michigan's Child Protective Services. "Because it had not been removed, the child would have been in consistent pain and obviously, would have needed medical treatment."

Solis also testified the three other children also showed signs of abuse and neglect.

A judge ruled that Gullett's other three children should stay in foster care and not be returned to her. She faces one charge of manslaughter when she is apprehended.



THE BAY CITY TIMES

Boy Scout leader charged in injury of three boys

Saturday, March 17, 2007

By HELEN LOUNSBURY

TIMES WRITER

STANDISH - Local scouting leaders say they're baffled by charges that surfaced this week against a West Branch man accused of injuring three boys during a recent scouting event.

Prosecutors charged Steven D. Robinson Tuesday with second-degree child abuse and assault and battery. The abuse charge is a four-year felony

Investigators allege that Robinson, 34, physically harmed three scouts, ages 10 and 11, during sporting events at a Feb. 18 "lock-in" at Standish-Sterling Central High School. One alleged victim sustained a broken leg - an injury that police say the boy reported he suffered during a scuffle Robinson initiated with him.

But the seriousness of the boys' allegations has area scouting leaders questioning how the abuses could have occurred with Boy Scout policy, and safeguards, in place.

"Two adults always have to be present where there's any child," said Ron Zettel, scout master for the West Branch Shoreline Boy Scout troop.

"It's the two-deep rule. And every leader goes through training before starting. It's taken very seriously because it's for the protection of the kids and the adult leaders."

In a situation like the February lock-in, reportedly well-chaperoned, directors for the Lake Huron Area Boy Scout Council said they, too, were similarly puzzled at how such alleged breaches could have occurred. The Auburn-based council oversees West Branch scout groups.

Council directors also pointed out Thursday that the Boy Scout organization does thorough criminal checks on every adult scouting leader. Robinson has no criminal history, leaders said.

The Lake Huron Area Council - which includes Bay City - in fact, uses more than 3,000 volunteer leaders. The organization also trains leaders specifically on child abuse and how to identify it, West Branch leaders said.

Robinson, who attended the lock-in with his son, is a former police officer, acquaintances said.

The abuse complaint against the West Branch man originated with the mother of two boys allegedly injured at the lock-in, police said. Officers, after interviewing the brothers, said they found a third alleged victim.

The lock-in at Standish-Sterling Central High drew dozens of cub scouts, grades 2-5, from Bay City north to Arenac and Ogemaw counties, scout leaders said. The overnight event is a recreation-packed, winter tradition for scout troops when outdoor camping is unrealistic, leaders explained.

Robinson remains free this week on a \$50,000 personal recognizance bond, court administrators said. He's scheduled to appear for a 9 a.m. status conference on Monday in Arenac District Court.

- Helen Lounsbury covers regional news for The Times. She can be reached at 1-800-727-7661 or by e-mail at hlounsbury@bc-times.com.

Adrian Daily Telegram

LOCAL NEWS BRIEFS

Friday, March 16, 2007 2:27 PM EDT

Abuse charges dropped

From staff reports

ADRIAN — Felony child abuse charges against a couple whose son was bitten Dec. 30 by a pit bull terrier in their home were dropped Tuesday in Lenawee County District Court in an agreement that called for them to plead guilty to misdemeanor charges of having an unlicensed and unvaccinated dog.

Amanda Jane Gilbert, 30, and Kelly James O'Neill, 34, were each placed on probation for one year by Judge Natalia M. Koselka during which they were ordered not to possess any animals. They were each fined \$50 and ordered to pay \$170 court costs and to share in paying \$260 in veterinary expenses.

Police were called to the family's home when the dog attacked their 10-year-old son, causing a severe wound to his left arm. Reports said Gilbert pulled the dog off her son and shut herself and the boy in a bathroom for safety. The dog kept an ambulance crew at bay outside until O'Neill arrived home and was able to lock it in a cage, according to a Lenawee County Sheriff's Department report. The pit bull was euthanized Jan. 1 after Lenawee Humane Society staff reported it was acting viciously toward them.

The couple told deputies they got the dog several weeks earlier from a relative who was getting rid of the animal because of its attitude. The dog was loose inside the home when it attacked Gilbert's son.



Couple accused in child rape lose their kids

Saturday, March 17, 2007

By Barton Deiters

The Grand Rapids Press

ALLEGAN -- Two young children of a couple who prosecutors say targeted kids for sexual purposes have been officially removed from their former home.

Sara Engel, a 25-year-old mother of a 2-year-old and a 9-month-old, is charged with three counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct for allegedly helping her boyfriend rape a 10-year-old girl.

The children's father, 27-year-old Matthew Cook, is charged in Wyoming with trying to hire a prostitute to lure children to his car to rape. Allegan prosecutors say he will be charged there and for the assault. Cook previously was convicted on child pornography charges.

"She is a danger to children in every way, shape or form," Allegan County Assistant Prosecutor Julie Nakfoor said of Engel in a Probate Court hearing Friday. "I think she is a danger to society as well."

Cook was notified of the hearing, but did not show up.

Nakfoor said there is evidence the couple's children suffered, as well. There are photos of Engel in explicit poses in front of the children, and the youngest child was in the same bed while another child allegedly was being molested, she said.

Family Court Referee Craig Sewell decided to keep the children under the care of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Engel's lawyer, Judith Zook, did not object to the children being removed, but she did ask that her client be allowed limited, written contact with the children. Zook said the children have a bond with their mother and even the written contact could be supervised by the court.

Sewell denied the request and ordered that the same conditions apply to Cook, who remains housed in the Kent County Jail, while Engel is at the Allegan County Jail.

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Article published Mar 17, 2007

Work begins on new child-advocacy center
Building will house offices, interview space

By DANIELLE QUISENBERRY
Times Herald

The interview rooms and offices of a new center that will help minimize the humiliation faced by child victims of abuse are starting to take shape on Military Street in Port Huron.

In the next few months, the interior walls will be finished, and the St. Clair County Child Abuse and Neglect Council should be moving into the former orthodontist building at 1107 Military St. The center will be called the Blue Water Area Child Advocacy Center.

When finished, the building will house the council's offices and spaces for child interviews, designed to allow investigators, prosecutors, police and social workers to interview children at the same time rather than in separate sessions.

To get the about \$537,000 project completed, the council secured a \$30,000 grant from the Community Foundation of St. Clair County's Youth Advisory Council and raised enough money to match a \$75,000 Citizens First grant received last year.

The council was able to match the grant by collecting individual donations; receiving grants from national groups; the James C. Acheson Foundation and the Port Huron Kiwanis Club; and organizing local fundraisers, said Director Sally Straffon.

There has been a lot of support for the center, Straffon said.

"We are just so committed. Others feel our passion and commitment and respond."

Veronica Ward, vice president of the Youth Advisory Council, said after touring the building, members of the group realized a lot of work is needed to get the center started.

Laborers enrolled in a Michigan Works training program, led by a foreman employed by the St. Clair County Regional Educational Service Agency, are moving about the new center, pounding nails and attaching drywall.

Ward said the youth council, a committee of high-school students who manage a \$1.4 million endowment, was further persuaded to award the grant because the center fulfills a great county need.

"It can help a lot of kids," said Ward, 18, of Port Huron. "It takes a horribly traumatic situation and makes it just little bit better."

When finished, young victims will sit at the center with a specially trained interviewer while all relevant parties listen through one-way glass and feed questions to the interviewer, equipped with an earpiece.

"For years and years, child victims of sexual abuse suffered the humiliation and stress of the assault, then suffered again every time they are interviewed," said Port Huron police Lt. Jim Jones. "The purpose is to eliminate a portion of that burden."

Day care gets harder to find in off-hours

March 18, 2007

BY GINA DAMRON

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Nicole Cremonte doesn't sleep much. No more than a couple of hours at a time throughout the night, if she's lucky.

When the 23-year-old mother of three isn't working swing shifts at Ram's Horn restaurant in Fraser, she is shuttling her young children -- ages 6, 3, and 5 weeks -- between day care and home in Roseville, where her newborn keeps her up most nights.

Cremonte never has had a 9-to-5 job, making child care a day-to-day challenge. To accommodate her ever-changing work schedule, she uses Wonder Years Child Development Center in Detroit -- one of the few day care centers across metro Detroit that offers 24-hour care.

Over the past two years, a growing number of parents throughout Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties have been forced into jobs where they work late into the evening or, sometimes, overnight, creating a need for more child-care facilities to operate longer hours, child-care experts say. These types of facilities are few and far between, making it tough on commuting parents.

"I think that because of the economy, people are taking whatever jobs they can get," said Mary Frontiero, program coordinator at the Michigan State University Extension-Macomb/St. Clair 4C. It is an extension of the Michigan 4C (Community Coordinated Child Care). "A year or so ago, they could pick and choose. Now they're desperate to find work."

Take Cremonte. A single mom, she needed more hours and more money, so she went to work as a waitress at Ram's Horn, where three years ago she was making \$100 in tips a night. Now, she may earn \$50 in tips.

But, she can't stop working.

"If you don't get enough hours," Cremonte said, "you can't pay the bills."

Need for longer hours

According to the county offices of the Michigan 4C, only one day care center offers around-the-clock care in Macomb County, two in Oakland County and 11 in Wayne County. In all of the counties, there are several smaller day care centers run out of people's homes that stay open later, but can be licensed to care for only a handful of children at a time.

Stephanie Paree, a research and referral specialist for the Oakland County Child Care Council, said over the past year, state officials have required the Michigan 4C county offices to track the number of referrals for 24-hour care and nontraditional hours to keep abreast of the growing need.

Some employers are trying to ease the strain on their workers right in the workplace. Crittenton Hospital Medical Center in Rochester is waiting for approval from the city to open a 24-hour center for its employees. The center will feature educational programming and an area where sick kids can rest and recuperate.

This is good news to Lapeer resident Jennifer Trudell, whose duties as a unit secretary at the hospital and mother to a 3-year-old son with chronic asthma collide more often than she would like. Frequently, she has to leave work early to trek to her son's day care in Lapeer when he has an asthma attack. Trudell, 32, said the children's sickbay at the proposed center would be a big help.

Not all workers, though, are so fortunate. Earlier this year, Ford Motor Co. announced it is going to close all of its day care centers to cut costs, including those in Ypsilanti, Sterling Heights, Livonia and Dearborn.

Fewer kids in care

Susan Allen, executive director of the Oakland County Child Care Council, said that the need for more accommodating child care reflects the changes in work philosophies.

"Now, your work comes with you, it travels with you, it's in your car, in your home," Allen said. "It's making our family lives different."

But, while the need for more day care options expands, fewer people are sending their kids into child care each year because of the expense. Referrals in Oakland County, for example, sank from 834 from December 2005 to February 2006 to 601 from last December to February. When parents can't afford day care, they often rely on family and friends for help.

Yet the need for facilities with longer hours grows.

Randa Sail, manager of Happy Days Educational Center in Oak Park, a 24-hour facility, said she sees the effects of a struggling economy, with parents being laid off. "We've been losing kids compared to what we used to have."

She said the center, licensed for 75 kids at a time, has 50 children enrolled.

Lashell Gibson, business manager of Wonder Years, said she has seen a decrease in the total number of clients, but has noticed a mounting need by parents who work at auto plants and hospitals, or work other jobs with irregular shifts.

Cheryl Belton, 27, of Warren works a swing shift at Macy's in Eastland Center in Harper Woods, which is why she brings her 4-year-old daughter, Shakira, to Wonder Years.

"I would love a 9-to-5 shift," she said. "It would make things a little bit easier for me."

Contact **GINA DAMRON** at 248-351-3293 or gdamron@freepress.com.

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Costs, trends threaten to close Kids' Korner

Saturday, March 17, 2007

DENISE FORD-MITCHELL

THE SAGINAW NEWS

The days of long waiting lists to get into the Salvation Army's Kids' Korner Child Care Center are gone.

Escalating costs, budget deficits and dwindling enrollment are jeopardizing Saginaw's oldest child-care facility, which is based at 2030 N. Carolina in Saginaw.

"We have to do something to turn things around," emphasized Maj. Wayne H. Ruston, 45, who with his wife, Maj. Tracy Ruston, heads the Saginaw branch of the Christian organization.

"We can pay \$30,000 to \$40,000 annually with the help that we get from the United Way to supplement the program. But we can't afford \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year. Unfortunately, we're at that point."

It's becoming increasingly difficult for the Salvation Army to compete with home-based child-care providers and extended family members, and couples aren't having as many children. To compound matters, Ruston explained, Saginaw Public School District leaders last year closed a nearby school, Fuerbringer Elementary, 2138 N. Carolina in Saginaw.

The Salvation Army provided child care for many youngsters who later went to Fuerbringer.

If they don't find a way to turn the tide soon, Salvation Army leaders warn they will have to close the day-care center, which opened its doors in 1939. So officials began revamping the program this month.

"We're looking at everything," Ruston said. "The last thing we want to do is lay off any more people, but at this point, we don't have a lot of options."

To date, the center has pink-slipped one full-time and four part-time employees. The center is licensed to care for 73

2-week-old to 12-year-old youngsters daily. Last year, the number of children at the center hovered around 30. Today, there are 18 to 22 full- and part-time youngsters enrolled at the center.

"We need 45 to 50 full-time children coming daily to keep things afloat," Ruston explained.

"I don't know that we've ever broke even. The sad thing is that if we were doing this for profit, we would have got out of the child-care business 50 years ago," he said.

"We're returning to our (biblical) roots," added Ann M. Bierman, director of marketing and development for Saginaw's Salvation Army.

The first step for Salvation Army officials was severing the center's nearly two-year-old ties with the federally funded Head Start initiative last year, which frowns on religion-based teachings.

"It was actually costing us more money and staff to have the program at a time when we already were losing money," Bierman said. "The number of federal requirements kept growing, so we decided it was best for us to drop that partnership and go back to Bible-based curriculum."

The revised program now includes Bible-story and character-building lessons. They also include hands-on projects and "Music with the Majors."

"It was costing us \$4,000 a year to have a person come in once a week to do music classes with the children," Wayne Ruston said. "My wife and I now do it ourselves, and the kids love it."

The nine-person day-care staff also has completed extensive training to better assess and track the progress of youngsters, Ruston said.

Salvation Army officials also renovated the center's playground, with the help of a \$71,000 grant from the Harvey Randall Wickes Foundation.

Volunteers replaced worn, outdated wooden equipment with a circular child-size walking and running track, a sturdy sandbox, durable plastic swings, slides and a climbing rock wall.

The new playground is on an adjacent lot at the rear of the Kids' Korner Child Care Center and is enclosed with a 7-foot vinyl privacy fence.

"Now that the area is more kid-friendly, hopefully we will attract more parents looking for affordable, safe, quality child care," Bierman added.

"We're doing everything we can to let parents know we have openings and to dispel the notion that the center caters only to low-income families.

"Nothing is further from the truth. We have a diverse population of children from many ethnic, social and economical backgrounds. We have plenty to offer."

And, Ruston added, "How many day-care centers have a pastor on staff actually interacting daily with the children?"

The center is open from 6a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays. It also offers before- and after-school transportation to local schools.

For information, call Ruston or Bierman at 793-8371.v

Denise Ford-Mitchell is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9668.

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Published March 18, 2007

CASA volunteers ready to assist

CHARLOTTE — After much hard work and 35 hours of training, eight new CASA volunteer advocates recently raised their right hands and swore to fulfill the duties of the office of the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Kids.

Eaton County Judge Michael Skinner swore in the new CASA volunteers to be the "eyes and ears of the court ... and the anchors in the lives of Eaton County's abused and neglected children."

The newest volunteers bring the total number of Eaton County advocates to 36 serving approximately 56 children. As of this January there are 90 children under the protection of the Eaton County court system who need a CASA volunteer.

"I am so pleased to see so many good people elect to volunteer with such a worthy organization and give of themselves." Judge Skinner went on to say, "The most valuable things you will do is be a constant in the lives of these children...I can't stress how import being there for the children is for them...The information that you provide the court is valuable," said Judge Skinner.

CASA for Kids is a non-profit organization that recruits and trains volunteers to advocate for children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect. A CASA volunteer's role is to visit with the children on their assigned case once every 7 to 10 days and provide an independent assessment to the court about all aspects of a child's life.

The CASA volunteer assessment reflects the strengths and needs of the child, the child's family, and caregivers. CASA volunteer recommendations are totally independent of any state agency and are predicated solely upon the child's best interests. There are many different types of volunteering opportunities with the CASA program. For more information, contact Kim or Michelle at (517) 543-3974 or e-mail the CASA staff at casa@eatoncounty.org.

— *From Eaton County CASA for Kids.*

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March 19, 2007

Partner Adopted by an Heiress Stakes Her Claim

By [PAM BELLUCK](#) and [ALISON LEIGH COWAN](#)

NORTH HAVEN, Me., March 13 — On an island liberally sprinkled with the affluent and well-connected members of such clans as Bush, du Pont, Rockefeller and Cabot, the Watson family occupies a special place.

The family, descendants of Thomas J. Watson Sr., the founder of I.B.M., owns more than 300 acres worth nearly \$20 million on the northern tip of this sea-splashed idyll 90 miles northeast of Portland. Over four decades, various Watsons summering here have flown helicopters and other aircraft; driven antique cars and collected scrimshaw. The family has held an annual square dance at their compound, Oak Hill.

Recently, though, the Watson name has surfaced in a different context, a most unusual lawsuit. It concerns Olive F. Watson, 59, granddaughter of the I.B.M. founder and daughter of Thomas J. Watson Jr., the company's longtime chief executive; and Patricia Ann Spado, 59, her former lesbian partner of 14 years.

In 1991, Ms. Watson, then 43, adopted Ms. Spado, then 44, under a [Maine](#) law that allows one adult to adopt another. The reason, Ms. Spado has contended in court documents, was to allow Ms. Spado to qualify as an heir to Ms. Watson's estate.

But less than a year after the adoption, Ms. Watson and Ms. Spado broke up. Then in 2004, Ms. Watson's mother died, leaving multimillion-dollar trusts established by her husband to be divided among their 18 grandchildren.

Re-enter Ms. Spado with a claim: Because she was adopted by Olive F. Watson, she said, she is technically Thomas J. Watson Jr.'s 19th grandchild and is therefore eligible for a share of the trusts.

In Maine, Watson trust lawyers have been trying to annul the adoption, saying that the law was not intended for same-sex partners and that the women did not really live in Maine, as they only summered there.

"The purpose of adoption is to foster a parent-child relationship, not a sexual relationship," a lawyer for the Watson trusts, Stephen W. Hanscom, told the probate court in Rockland, Me., last month. "An adoption on that basis would violate public policy," he said, and added, "There was a fraud perpetrated on the court because Miss Spado did not live in North Haven at the time of the adoption and the court did not have jurisdiction to grant it."

In briefs, Ms. Spado's lawyers have said that no fraud was committed, that an annulment would put other adoptions on shaky ground, and that the "courts cannot unravel longstanding judgments based on third-party aversions to personal lifestyles."

In Greenwich, Conn., where Ms. Watson's parents lived, the family's trust lawyers have taken a different tack, saying that Mr. Watson, who died in 1993, did not even know about the adoption and never intended for Ms. Spado to be an heir. A guardian ad litem appointed to represent Watson grandchildren yet to be born or identified, Henry W. Pascarella, has called the women's 1991

arrangement a “Mephistophelian maneuver of a middle-aged woman adopting her still older middle-aged female lover ‘as her child.’ ”

A Greenwich probate judge ruled against Ms. Spado in 2005, but her lawyers have appealed, contending that the trusts cannot “be construed to exclude a legally adopted grandchild of Mr. Watson solely because that grandchild was an adult at the time of the adoption.”

Many states allow adult adoption, but the laws were primarily intended for situations like a stepparent adopting a stepchild later in life, said D. Marianne Blair, an adoption expert at the [University of Tulsa](#) College of Law.

However, some same-sex couples began using the adoption process to establish financial security or inheritance for their partners, said Arthur S. Leonard, a professor at New York Law School.

“Before we had domestic partnership ordinances, before same-sex marriage or civil unions, back then there wasn’t much you could do,” Professor Leonard said.

Then as now, the adoption laws varied by state, and it is not known how many of these arrangements have been made.

In New York, some people sought adoption as a way to inherit a rent-controlled apartment from a same-sex partner, Professor Leonard said, but a 1984 court ruling said that same-sex couples could not use adoption to create legal family ties.

A state court in Delaware later allowed same-sex partner adoptions there, Professor Leonard said.

But in Connecticut, where the trusts were established, the law required the person doing the adopting to be older than the adoptee. The family’s trust lawyers have said in a brief filed in Maine, “this court should not allow homosexual couples from New York to use vacation time in Maine as the jurisdictional basis for an adoption that is disallowed in their own state.”

Ms. Spado has filed briefs saying that the arrangement was legitimate and that Maine law did not require them to live there year-round.

Experts said it is difficult to nullify an adoption but also hard to convince a court to rule against the intent of someone’s will.

Making this case even more complex is the fact that after the couple separated, Ms. Watson paid Ms. Spado a \$500,000 settlement. Ms. Spado has contended that the money was to buy out her interest in property the women jointly owned, and should not affect the trusts. The Watson lawyers have said it was intended to put to rest further claims. After the settlement, however, Ms. Watson signed a letter affirming “our agreement that I have not and that I shall at no time initiate any action to revoke or annul my adoption of you.”

Ms. Watson declined to comment on the case, but a person close to her who insisted on anonymity, said Ms. Watson is “not in favor of Patty’s inheriting the money.” This person said, “If she herself could annul the adoption, she certainly would.”

Ms. Watson, who has a home in the Hamptons, and who has been a board member for Empire State Pride Agenda and other gay-rights groups, has in recent years lived in Miami with her current partner.

Ms. Watson adopted two infant boys, now ages 6 and 8, who are listed as grandchildren in the trust documents. (Ms. Spado is not.) The trust lawyers and those for Ms. Spado declined to discuss the case.

Ms. Spado, who lives in New York and California and works in interior design, has said in court documents that she “has relied for almost 15 years on the adoption in ordering her financial affairs,” and that she needed the money in part to help her ailing biological mother, who is 81 and who supports her desire to remain an adopted daughter of Ms. Watson.

Ms. Spado has said in a legal brief that the adoption had come about at the suggestion of Ms. Watson, after the two met in California in 1978 and began living together. The brief also said that Ms. Spado gave up her career to move in with Ms. Watson, and that “the relationship took on many characteristics of a marriage,” including joint bank accounts.

“Olive’s parents and siblings respected and honored the couple’s relationship,” the brief said. For one birthday, Mr. Watson gave Ms. Spado flowers and his wife, Olive C. Watson, gave her a Bulgari bracelet that he had given her. “Olive’s mother, in particular,” the brief said, “was deeply thankful for the fact that Patricia was instrumental in getting Olive’s life back together after a long period of self-destructive and dangerous behavior.”

In the Town of North Haven, the dichotomy can be stark between the 380 year-round islanders and the summer people, who include the actor Oliver Platt, and [Ned Lamont](#), who unsuccessfully ran for the [United States Senate](#) in Connecticut in 2006. A musical written about the island and performed by locals under the direction of John Wulp, the Tony Award-winning producer, summed it up in lyrics:

“Summer people, summer people, busy, busy summer people. Sailing, swimming, biking, golfing, having parties all the time. Island people, island people, busy, busy island people. Cooking, cleaning, mowing, running, making summer people fine.”

Residents said the Watsons are friendly and generous, but spend much of their time at their compound, where they allow public use of their private air strip when no Watsons are in town.

Some residents seemed surprised to learn about the adoption and court fight. As Christie Hallowell, who knows Ms. Watson and who is executive director of the nonprofit agency North Haven Arts and Enrichment, put it, “It all seems very unusual.”

Pam Belluck reported from North Haven, Me., and Alison Leigh Cowan from Stamford, Conn. Ariel Sabar contributed reporting from Rockland, Me.

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Mom hopes to find kidney donor

Family may offer hope - if she can find them

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Saturday, March 17, 2007

By Shantell M. Kirkendoll

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FLINT - Seemingly healthy, Juaice Lamar was in renal failure during what she thought was a bout of nausea or maybe a pregnancy.

The news that the 36-year-old Flint woman needed a kidney transplant was hard enough. But what came next was even more daunting: The typical wait for a donor kidney is five years, and asking a family member, the best medical match, to donate is impossible because she's adopted.

"I've always known I was adopted," said Lamar, a nurse's assistant at McLaren Regional Medical Center.

"I wouldn't be looking for my biological family if I didn't have renal failure because I had a very good life growing up."

But her biological connections could be life saving. She was born Aug. 8, 1970, at Hurley Medical Center and was adopted by Gloria Lamar, a Flint elementary teacher, about three months later on Nov. 6.

Growing up it was just Juaice (pronounced wah-reese) and her adoptive mom, but a family friend says Juaice Lamar may have three older sisters.

"I don't know if that's true," she said.

Her birth certificate only lists Gloria Lamar as a parent.

Gloria Lamar, 66, who has retired to Atlanta, adopted Juaice as a single parent through a social service agency. She was never told why the mother gave up the baby girl, but she welcomes the opportunity for Juaice to learn about her past and her people.

"To tell you the truth I never had any fear about her knowing her natural mother," Gloria Lamar said in a phone interview from Atlanta. "Like me getting married, if the Lord planned it, that's the way it would go."

Ironically, Gloria Lamar is on dialysis, too, but she says it's tougher on her daughter, who is working full time and caring for her children.

She believes Juaice may have sisters or brothers still in Michigan, but if the family is found, there are still hurdles of medical tests and gaining consent.

"Finding someone who would be willing (to donate a kidney) is something we have to pray about and leave to the Lord," she said. "This is their chance to do what's right and what's good. Even if they don't, I think it would give Juaice peace of mind to know about her natural family."

QUICK TAKE

Want to help?

- Juaice Lamar is looking for her biological family in hopes they can help with a life-saving kidney transplant.

- She was born Aug. 8, 1970, at Hurley Medical Center.

- Contact: (810) 618-3744.

Kidney Awareness Month

- Michigan marks Kidney Awareness Month in March to bring attention to the need to protect kidney health and diagnose problems early. Diabetes and high blood pressure account for 70 percent of kidney disease. One in nine Michigan adults suffer from chronic kidney disease, according to the National Kidney Foundation of Michigan. Details: www.nkfm.org.

Juaice is doing what she can to stay healthy, including losing 90 pounds and undergoing kidney dialysis three times a week. Each session lasts 4 1/2 hours.

Juaice Lamar, who is black, is also undergoing the myriad of tests needed to get on a transplant list and join the 2,521 others in Michigan waiting for a kidney.

Nearly half of those waiting for kidneys are black.

"Dialysis is important, but it's not the same as a functioning kidney," said Dr. Sayed Osama, a kidney specialist who chairs the nephrology department at Hurley Medical Center. "A transplant improves likelihood of survival, improves quality of life and reduces risk of cardiovascular diseases."

Although some people can do dialysis for more than 20 years, a 20-something dialysis patient has the life span of a 65- to 70-year-old, he said.

Kidney failure among young adults is getting more common because of dual epidemics of hypertension and diabetes, which is a greater burden among blacks.

Juaice Lamar did not realize she had high blood pressure until her kidneys were failing. Hypertension may run in the family she's never met, she said.

Flint attorney Marc T. Dedenbach, who specializes in adoptions, said they have evolved because of such health issues.

"Look at cancers in particular," he said. "Family history can be the best indicator, so it makes good sense to have information like this," he said of a state registry started 10 years for birth parents.

The Michigan Department of Human Services allows biological parents to join the registry available for adult adoptees to search for them or personal information.

Biological parents also have increasingly shared information about family medical history and bucked the age-old trend of remaining completely anonymous forever.

Juaice Lamar was adopted through an agency, but information is not available about the medical history.

The mother of three children - Amarion, 3, Chet, 5, and Taylor, 14 - has shared her story whenever she could, including with Janice Dillon of Flushing, a HeadStart teacher.

"She's a good mother, and dealing with dialysis was getting to her," said Dillon who contacted the Flint Journal.

Dillon has a brother with a hereditary kidney problem, and she said it's something "I have to think about for me and my boys."

"But beyond that, as I left her house one day, she said, 'Don't forget about me,'" Dillon recalled. "And I haven't. I could tell she was feeling hopeless."

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WZZM13 ONLINE - ABC TELEVISION for ALL OF WEST MICHIGAN

Mich. teen pleads guilty for bringing gun to school

AP

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LUDINGTON - An eighth-grade student who took a loaded gun to school has pleaded guilty in juvenile court to carrying a concealed weapon in a weapon-free zone.

The 14-year-old boy was ordered Thursday to undergo treatment at a mental health center.

Police said he took the revolver to O.J. DeJonge Junior High in Ludington and planned to shoot at least three staff members.

An assistant principal found the gun in the boy's locker Jan. 15 after other students tipped off a teacher, police said.

An unrelated home invasion charge is pending against the teen.

Web Editor: [John Bumgardner](#), Assignment Desk



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THE BAY CITY TIMES

Homeless mission opens doors to show progress, need for men's wing

Monday, March 19, 2007

By PATI LALONDE

TIMES WRITER

Since it opened its doors two years ago, the Good Samaritan Rescue mission has become a safe haven for as many as 350 women and children.

On Sunday, the mission doors will open to the public to offer a glimpse of what has been accomplished, but also what is left to complete - the men's wing.

Starting with 32 beds in 2005, the mission can now house 40 people in the women's wing. There are also two rooms that hold up to six members of an intact family. A third is scheduled to open next month.

Residents can also shop for clothing, toys and supplies in another area of the shelter.

Twice a month, the shelter hands out food baskets containing three to four days worth of staples to members of the community.

As staff and residents of the mission get ready to celebrate Good Samaritan's second anniversary in Bay City, there is still more to be done to help the homeless of our community, said Dan Streeter, director of the mission at 713 Ninth St.

Those attending the Sunday open house will see a presentation showing the building's transformation. There will also be an update on the progress of the men's wing and a tour of that part of the building. Refreshments will be served.

The open house kicks off the fundraising efforts to raise \$475,000 to complete the men's wing, said Streeter. The men's wing is needed in Bay County, he said.

"In 2006, we had more than 100 men knocking on the door looking for a place to stay," Streeter said. "We did what we could. What we do in most cases is offer them some type of food assistance, clothing assistance. But the majority walked away with no place to stay."

The men were offered transportation to the City Rescue Mission of Saginaw, the parent organization of Good Samaritan. However, many don't want to leave their hometown.

While Streeter says it is hard to turn the men away, the safety of the residents comes first.

"We just have a female staff in place," he said. "We can't bring in a male population without male staff. That's part of the reason of campaigning. We're doing more than just housing people. We help provide a new hope and a new direction for living. People don't have to continue this way. It's a better way for living."

Although staff at Home Depot were instrumental in getting the men's wing off the ground with donations of supplies and volunteers, there is still a long way to go. The \$475,000 will address structural issues, continuing renovations, furniture and 28 months of operational expenses.

Streeter is hoping members of the community will become community partners by making a three-year pledge of \$1,000, or \$27.78 a month. The shelter is funded entirely by donations.

"We're asking people to get on board and become partners in this project.

"They can become the backbone of support over three years. We're passionate enough about the homeless problem in the Bay area. We want to get the shelter off the ground and make sure it stays open."

- Pati LaLonde is a features writer for The Times. She can be reached at 894-9666, or by e-mail at plalonde@bc-times.com.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Support Housing Resources by walking for the homeless

Sunday, March 18, 2007

By Jeffrey Lee

Eighteen years ago I was fortunate to be part of a small group of real estate professionals who shared a vision to actively tackle a problem in our community: the hardship of homelessness.

In our complex world, we all face problems and find it a necessity to be able to come home and forget about our daily woes; a place to find a moment's peace. Having a home, a place to call your own, is part of the bedrock of our country's foundation. "Home" is an important thread in the fabric of our daily lives.

Few problems are as complex and demoralizing as becoming homeless. No home -- think about it. How do we lose the fabric of normal existence? Most people do not suddenly "become" homeless. Rather, it is typically a process that happens gradually. During this process people are often drained of their finances, threatened with legal action and the loss of possessions.

If we view this situation from the perspective of a child or teen, it magnifies -- they see their parents are stressed, their valuables are lost and normal routine becomes impossible. During these times children still have to attend school, do homework and grow academically and socially.

Our group saw possibilities for meeting this challenge thanks to the outstanding organization, Housing Resources, Inc. HRI was answering this need by helping people with effective programs in a dignified and caring manner. One way that HRI works is preventively, by helping people keep their current housing or finding alternative housing. An experienced staff includes counselors who help families manage a budget in order to afford rent and regulate expenses, negotiate leases and seek alternative housing.

In more dire circumstances, HRI provides the only shelter which allows families to stay together. Thus, they provide a supportive and stable environment for parents and their children when they need it most.

HRI requires participants to actively secure stable housing. This approach has helped people help themselves. In this manner, HRI works to keep families in homes and create a stable situation that is manageable. I have seen HRI in action. They are an efficient and effective organization with a realistic plan. We, as a community, owe Housing Resources, Inc., a big thank you for helping us address this pressing issue.

The HRI Walk-for-the-Homeless is March 24. Please attend and say thank you in person.

Jeffrey Lee is the Walk-for-the-Homeless chairman and is on the Greater Kalamazoo Association of REALTORS board of directors.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Medicaid changes spur protests from Allegan County officials

Monday, March 19, 2007

By Rod Smith

Special to the Gazette

ALLEGAN -- The Allegan County Board of Commissioners, saying that the federal government is unfairly changing Medicaid rules and that the changes could potentially affect the health of hundreds of county residents, is sending a letter of protest over a possible loss of \$148,191.

Health Officer Rashmi Ganesan recently told commissioners that the federal government had decided to disallow Medicaid payments for any administrative costs exceeding 10 percent for the years 2004, 2005 and 2006.

"According to the rules, we were doing it right," she said. "It's just that they changed the rules somewhere along the way."

Recently the state said it will cover the costs for 2005 and 2006. But that still means the county could be required to pay back \$148,191 for 2004.

"They could be asking us to return that money, which we've already spent and used up," Ganesan said.

Commissioners agreed to send a letter to Governor Jennifer Granholm, seeking her thoughts on resolving the issue, and copies of it to state and federal legislators.

According to the letter, "Services to vulnerable citizens of this state will suffer the most."

One service that will suffer, according to the letter, is the Maternal Infant Health Program, which addresses infant mortality, child abuse and pregnancy issues.

Reductions in this program "will ultimately be detrimental to the already financially-strapped medical system," the letter said.

The letter says the new rules also could affect current and future Medicaid funding, resulting in service cuts.

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Buyouts don't mean end of child support

March 18, 2007

BY SUSAN TOMPOR

FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Just as people budget for paying the mortgage or making a car payment after a buyout, some also must consider how they'll meet their child support obligations.

Bill O'Leary, an attorney in Taylor, said he's been getting calls from divorced employees who are looking at buyouts at the Chrysler Group and Ford Motor Co.

They want to know what happens in the case of child support.

"It's a concern for people," he said. "I think it reflects part of the anxiety involved."

Direct deductions

If you are way behind on child support, be warned that you won't get as much money as you're expecting.

"The Friend of the Court is going to take what's owed out of the buyout," O'Leary said.

Susan L. Thorman, president of the Michigan Friend of the Court Association, agreed.

In Michigan, she said, the Friend of the Court is taking the position that the entire buyout check, if necessary, could be withheld to cover any past-due child support.

Typically, though, most Michigan autoworkers don't owe thousands of dollars in child support, she said. Most of them are having child support money taken out of their paychecks.

"These folks are not the folks who owe that kind of money," she said.

Looking ahead

A greater concern for many people is what happens after the buyout.

How do newly bought-out workers cover their child support payments in the future?

It's important to talk to the Friend of the Court about your own situation -- and possibly contact an attorney -- about changing the way payments are made.

If you get another job, notify the Friend of the Court and make sure your child support payments are taken out of the paycheck at your new place of employment.

"They shouldn't assume we know they're getting a new job," Thorman said.

And if you pick up a lower-paying job and know that's the best money you'll make for a while, it may be necessary to seek relief. You may need to see if child support payments could be reduced, based on your new level of pay.

If you are getting a pension check, the child support payments could be taken out of that check. Talk to your former employer.

But what if you're taking a lump-sum buyout payment but have decided to just enjoy life for a while? Say you've got no plans to look for a new job for the next four or five months?

Then be sure to set aside money to cover child support in the future.

"You need to make provision for your children, if you're not transitioning into another job," Thorman said.

"The court is going to say, 'You received this, why didn't you set money aside to take care of your obligation?' " she said.

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Michigan Report

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WELFARE CASELOADS RISE IN FEBRUARY, **FOOD ASSISTANCE FALLS**

After a decrease in January, families receiving cash assistance from the state slightly increased in February, according to reports from the Department of Human Services.

The Family Independence Program had 88,756 cases in February, up from 88,472 cases in January. The caseload was still smaller than in December, which had 88,795 cases. The cases represented 240,464 people, up from 239,778 people in January and still less than December's 240,659.

For the first time in 17 months, the Food Assistance Program showed a slight decrease, with 551,981 households representing 1.198 million people, down from 552,135 households representing 1.199 million people in January. December had 550,235 households representing 1.196 million people.

Childcare cases also fell in February, with 56,628 cases representing care for 106,771 children, compared to January, which had 61,174 cases representing 115,577 children. In December there were 61,078 cases representing the same amount of children.

The number of people required to work reporting income fell slightly by a percentage point to 28 percent. That's down from recent month lows of 29 percent. The percent of cases exceeding the federal 60-month limit continued to hold at 10 percent.



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Local DHS employees selected for Star Award

LANSING — Twenty-four Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) employees from around the state are winners of a "Star" award for their participation in the Paternity Establishment Percentage, or PEP, Team.

"The PEP Team helps increase paternity established each year for children of unwed parents," said DHS Director Marianne Udow.

"Formed three years ago, the team developed and implemented plans that led to improved paternity establishment."

The "Star" awards are given to DHS employees and teams from around the state for their good work, teamwork and providing quality service. The team members received their award alongside two other teams and five individual employees receiving award during a Feb. 27 event in Lansing.

Local team members, all of whom work for DHS Office of Child Support, included:

- Carolyn McArthur of Delta Township near Lansing.
- Ian Broughton and Steve Mayer from DeWitt.
- Ardene Martin of Dimondale.
- Maria Candy and Lynn Walker of Holt.
- Debi Bedenbender, Jennifer Garavaglia, Sharene Johnson and Crystal Perry from Lansing.
- Jennifer Reed for Portland.
- Kathryn Scott from Williamston.

The Star Award program is an annual employee recognition program started in 2007. Award winners were nominated by peers and/or managers.

For more information on the Department of Human Services go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

— *From the Michigan Department of Human Services*

Unbelievable analogy

In response to Kent County Department of Human Services employee Juanita Glover's comments comparing her present day working condition with "... being on a plantation ("Agency's black workers claim bias," Press, March 8)." I believe her ignorance is running neck-in-neck with her arrogance if she thinks anyone believes that line of reason. I'm a descendant of Anglo-Irish who never spent a day on a plantation. However, if my ancestors were part of the population that was enslaved at some point in U.S. history, I'd be offended at her shallow, self-serving analogy.

JIM WEILER/Grand Rapids



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House Appropriators Retain SCHIP Funding, Strip other Health Provisions

On March 15, the House Appropriations Committee approved the fiscal year 2007 supplemental spending bill for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The legislation included \$750 million in emergency spending for the State Children's Health Insurance Program. The committee rejected an amendment offered by Reps. Dave Weldon (R-Fla.) and Jack Kingston (R-Ga.) that would have prevented individuals over age 18 from being eligible for State Children's Health Insurance Program and capped income eligibility levels to no more than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. During committee debate on the bill, members struck other health care-related provisions that were being considered earlier in the week, including changes to Deficit Reduction Act citizenship provisions as they relate to the treatment of "deemed infants" and to foster children. The bill also has provisions to change the DRA to treat citizen applicants in the same manner as immigrant applicants are currently treated during the period they are obtaining their documentation; provisions addressing the benchmark benefit packages and Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment benefits; provisions requiring public notification by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services of state plan amendments to change benchmark benefit packages; and provisions to rescind certain funds for reimbursement of emergency health services for undocumented aliens.

Prior to the committee vote, the American Public Human Services Association and the National Association of State Medicaid Directors had sent a letter to committee Chairman David Obey (D-Wis.) and Ranking Member Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.) regarding the health provisions. The letter expressed strong support for providing sufficient funding to avert shortfalls in SCHIP and the simplifications to the citizenship documentation requirements. In addition, APHSA and NASMD asked that the committee retain state flexibility in other changes that it was considering to the DRA, among other issues. The House is expected to schedule the bill for a vote on the floor next week. The Senate also will consider a supplemental spending bill. The APHSA-NASMD letter is available [online](#).

Senate Releases FY 2008 Budget Resolution

This week, Senate Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad (D-S.D.) released his budget blueprint for FY 2008, and the committee considered the measure on March 14 and 15. The proposal left out the various Medicaid and Medicare cuts included in the president's FY 2008 budget plan that was proposed earlier this year. Instead, the \$2.96 trillion budget plan proposes an \$18 billion increase in domestic discretionary spending over the administration's budget request, including increases for health insurance. Specifically, the budget resolution calls for the \$15 billion over five years that some members of Congress are seeking for expansion of SCHIP. It also includes a "reserve fund" of \$35 billion that could become available if members agree to spending reductions in other areas. The full Senate may schedule a vote on the resolution next week. [More information](#) on the budget proposal.

House Agriculture Committee Holds Food Stamp Hearing

On March 13, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry held a hearing to review the Food Stamp Program and its impact on children's health. The subcommittee heard testimony from Nancy Montanez-Johner, undersecretary for food, nutrition and consumer services at the U.S. Department of Agriculture; Kate Coler, USDA deputy undersecretary; Clarence Carter, deputy administrator for the Food Stamp Program; James Weill, president of the Food Research and Action Center; Mariana Chilton, principal investigator at the Philadelphia GROW Project; Janet Marguia, president and chief executive officer of the National Council of La Raza; Rene Massey, director of Alabama's Baldwin County Department of Human Resources; Gary Brunk, executive director of Kansas Action for Children; and Kim McCoy Wade, executive director of the California Association of Food Banks. The witnesses addressed the FSP's effects on decreasing food insecurity, improving child health and nutrition, and supporting low-income households. Witnesses voiced numerous concerns, including requests to maintain or expand the program's present categorical eligibility options and nutrition education component. A number of House members spoke, including Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), who said the FSP has a "checkered past" and that efforts must continue to weed out fraud and abuse. Goodlatte is not on the subcommittee but is ranking member of the Agriculture Committee. Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-Ohio), who is also on the full committee, expressed interest in increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables. Rep. Charles Boustany (R-La.) discussed the FSP's high administrative costs, and asked the USDA witnesses to give him a written response on how they could be reduced. Other members' questions covered ways to improve nutrition education, concerns about eligibility modernization efforts in Texas, and whether there are enough caseworkers to adequately administer the program. [More information](#).

House Education and Labor Committee Marks Up Head Start Legislation

On Feb. 28, the House Committee on Education and Labor held a full committee markup and approved the Improving Head Start Act of 2007. The committee adopted 14 amendments to the program, including one that increases in the eligibility for Head Start from 100 percent of the federal poverty level to 130 percent and one permitting providers to use up to 10 percent of their funds for transportation. The panel rejected amendments that would have allowed providers to hire employees based on religious preferences and eight states to take over their

Head Start programs. The reauthorized bill also includes provisions that will improve teacher quality by increasing salaries and training; discontinue the National Reporting System as a method of evaluating standards and develop a new accountability system; bolster linkages with state education departments and systems of mental health; and expand Early Head Start. Under the reauthorization, 10,000 additional children will participate in Head Start. The program was reauthorized for \$7.4 billion for fiscal year 2008, an increase from 2007's \$6.9 billion. Members attending included Ranking Member Michael Castle (R-Del.) and Reps. Dale E. Kildee (D-Mich.), Robert E. Andrews (D-N.J.), Robert C. Scott (D-Va.), Lynn C. Woolsey (D-Calif.), Dennis J. Kucinich (D-Ohio), Carol Shea-Porter (D-N.H.), Paul Sarbanes (D-Md.), John Yarmuth (D-Ky.), Mark Souder (R-Ind.), Luis Fortuño (R-P.R.), Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.), and Rob Bishop (R-Utah). [More details on the reauthorization.](#)

Senate, House Committees Holds Hearings on Health Care Coverage

On March 14, the Senate Finance Committee held a hearing on universal health care. Both committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Ranking Member Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) voiced their support of the idea and their intentions to move legislation on the issue in the future. Although there was disagreement among committee members and witnesses regarding exactly what the legislation should look like, there was consensus on a few points, including: (1) the cost of universal health care would be between \$70 billion and \$100 billion per year; (2) providing universal coverage would involve much more than simply redirecting current health care spending; and (3) it would be more feasible to work with elements of the existing health care system as opposed to a "radical overhaul." Several witnesses agreed that legislation addressing coverage for the uninsured should precede legislation addressing rising health care costs, and that legislation expanding coverage for more Americans should be separate from that reauthorizing SCHIP. Grassley voiced his support for legislation that would include incentives for purchase of private coverage, rather than universal government-provided health care. There was disagreement as to whether the move toward universal coverage would need to be accompanied by tax increases, and what other funding for the initiative would be. The hearing also examined features of the Massachusetts universal health care initiative and whether Congress should adopt the state's law on a national level. [More information.](#) On March 15, the House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions held a hearing on expanding health coverage through employer-provided benefits. [More information.](#)

House Panel Reviews Continuing Health Care Problems in the Wake of Katrina

On March 13, the House Energy and Commerce Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee held a hearing to examine the continuing health care needs and problems in the regions most affected by Hurricane Katrina. The hearing consisted of three panels made up of representatives from federal, state, and local government agencies; local health care systems, centers, and providers from the Gulf region; and policy experts. The witnesses emphasized that there are still major problems facing the health care systems in the region 18 months after the storm, including provider shortages, lack of hospital beds, inadequate mental health services and bureaucratic barriers preventing much-needed financial assistance. Subcommittee members and witnesses also discussed the federal assistance provided to the region for health care, and disagreement ensued about the level of adequacy of federal aid to the region and of the adequacy of the accounting for that aid. [More information.](#)

Reports Assess Children's Status in the Federal Budget

On March 15, First Focus and the Urban Institute conducted a congressional staff briefing on children and the federal budget. Staff members heard testimony from former Rep. John Edward Porter (R-Ill.), chairman of First Focus; C. Eugene Steuerle, senior fellow at the Urban Institute; Julia Isaacs, child and family policy fellow at the Brookings Institution; Robert H. Dugger, chairman of Partnership for America's Economic Success; and Michael Laracy, coordinator for public policy at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Urban Institute's recently released report on children and the federal budget was the main focus of the briefing. Steuerle, a co-author of the report, summarized the study's key points, which include the declining share of domestic spending on children's programs since 1960 and the declining share for children's programs in the future as the share of spending on health and retirement for the elder population grows. Steuerle added that future funding for children's programs will be squeezed due to rising retirement and a limited revenue base. Dugger cited tax entitlements as another issue affecting funding for children's programs. Isaacs presented First Focus' legislative agenda, which includes strengthening tax policy for children and families; fully funding SCHIP; increasing resources for high schools through No Child Left Behind reauthorization; and investing in early childhood education. The Urban Institute report, Kids' Share 2007: How Children Fare in the Federal Budget, is available at <http://www.urban.org/Pressroom/kidsshare2007.cfm>. The First Focus brief, Priority or Afterthought? Children and the Federal Budget, is available at [this link](#).

APHSA Reschedules National Spring Conference for June 1-5

On March 15, APHSA announced that it has rescheduled its National Spring Conference. The conference, which includes meetings of the National Councils of State and Local Human Service Administrators and the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators, will be held at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill on June 1-5, 2007. The hotel is at 400 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., in Washington, where APHSA has held many conferences, most recently the 2006 Summer Conference. Starting on March 19, those wishing to attend may call the Hyatt at (800) 233-1234 to make sleeping room reservations. The cutoff date for the conference rate is May 1, 2007. The rate is lower (\$162.00 single/\$187.00 double) due to a seasonal decrease in the government per-diem rate. For those who registered for the March meeting, APHSA will apply your current registration payment through an expedited process. Please visit APHSA's web site (www.aphsa.org) to download the registration form. Please check the box at the top of the form indicating your prior registration, fill in your name and agency, and fax it to the association. There is no need to include payment information if you were registered for the March meeting. [More details.](#)